DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 682 EC 304 974

AUTHOR	Swan, William W., Ed.; Brown, Carvin L., Ed.
TITLE	The Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN) Research Report, 1989.
INSTITUTION	Georgia Psychoeducational Network.; Georgia State Dept. of Education, Atlanta.; Georgia Univ., Athens.
REPORT NO	GPN-RR-89-001
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	49p.; Published annually. For other reports in this series, see EC 304 971-976.
AVAILABLE FROM	Alpine Psychoeducational Program, P.O. Box 2459, Gainesville, GA 30501 ($5).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	GPN Research Report; n4 1989
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Attitudes; *Autism; *Behavior Disorders; Disability Identification; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; Inservice Teacher Education; Intervention; Leadership Qualities; Leadership Responsibility; *Needs Assessment; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Education; *Professional Development; Stress Management; Student Characteristics; Surveys; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Georgia; *Georgia Psychoeducational Network

ABSTRACT

This collection of papers includes five articles on the education of students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders participating in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network Program (GPN). "Training Needs of Fully Certified BD Teachers in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network" (Robert J. Stansberry) found, in a survey of 203 certified teachers of students with Behavior Disorders (BD), that teachers expressed a need for training in social skills/affective education and strategies for dealing with job-related stress. "GPN Program Needs Assessments: Three Examples" (William W. Swan and others) describes the needs assessment process used with three GPN programs in terms of purpose, importance, strategic characteristics, and procedures. "The Training Needs of Parents of Students in Programs for Severe Emotional Disturbance, Behavior Disorders, and Preschool Handicapped" (Harry L. Dangel and Michael D. Powell) reports on a survey of parents of students with severe emotional disturbances and/or BD focusing on their child-rearing training needs. "An Initial Study To Describe Autistic Children in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network" (Robert A. Gordon and others) provides data on gender, race, age group, custody, age at onset of abnormality, and type and length of services provided. "Leaders' Views of Effective Leadership of GPN Programs" (William W. Swan and others) discusses a survey of 24 directors of GPN programs on aspects of their leadership. (Each article contains references.) (CR)

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GPN RESEARCH REPORT

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GPN Research Report
, 1989

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The GPN RESEARCH REPORT is published by a consortium of the Georgia Psychoeducational Network, the Georgia Department of Education, and the University of Georgia to serve the needs of those who educate severely emotionally disturbed and severely behaviorally disordered students in Georgia. The emphasis is on both quantitative and qualitative research in all areas of operation of the Programs.

ORDERING INFORMATION: Individuals who wish to receive the GPN RESEARCH REPORT should contact: Dr. Wayne Moffett, Director, Alpine Psychoeducational Program, P.O. Box 2459, Gainesville, Georgia, 30501. Copies of the GPN RESEARCH REPORT are $3.00 each. Checks should be made payable to Pioneer RESA.

GPN Research Report #89-001, 4, 1989

THE GEORGIA PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL NETWORK (GPN) RESEARCH REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Training Needs of Fully Certified BD Teachers in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network *Robert J. Stansberry*	1
GPN Program Needs Assessments: Three Examples *William W. Swan, Robert T. Jacob, N. Wayne Moffett, and Juanda Ponsell*	11
The Training Needs of Parents of Students in Programs for Severe Emotional Disturbance, Behavior Disorders, and Preschool Handicapped. *Harry L. Dangel and Michael D. Powell*	21
An Initial Study to Describe Autistic Children in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network. *Robert A. Gordon, Teri L. Busbee, Jo Anne S. Cook, Kimberly Heninger, and April J. Kennedy*	29
Leaders' Views of Effective Leadership of GPN Programs *William W. Swan, Carvin L. Brown, Carolyn Combs, Phillip H. Pickens, Juanda Ponsell, and Lawrence R. Weiner*	35

GPN Research Report
#89-001, 4, 1989

Training Needs of Fully Certified BD Teachers in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network

Robert J. Stansberry
Henry County

The purpose of this study was to describe the reported training needs of fully certified experienced and inexperienced teachers employed by the Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN) in 1988-1989. The study also sought to determine if differences in reported training needs existed based upon program settings and ages of students served. The Training Needs Questionnaire was distributed to all GPN teachers. Surveys from 203 fully certified GPN teachers were returned and used for the data analysis. Highest reported training needs were in the areas of social skills/affective education and strategies for dealing with job related stress. Few differences in reported training needs were found among groups of teachers based upon experience level and program settings. However, reported training needs for teachers of preschool age students differed from other age groups.

The Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN) consists of 24 state funded, community-based, non-residential, locally operated units that serve multi-county geographic areas linking services with local school systems, area community health centers, and regional mental health hospitals. The GPN provides comprehensive psycho-educational services (combined mental health and special education services) to severely emotionally disturbed/severely behavior disordered students and their families in every school system in the state (Wood, Swan, & Jordan, In Press).

Each student identified as eligible has an individualized education program (IEP) prior to placement in a GPN Program. The IEP documents the current level of the student's functioning, the annual goals, and the short term objectives for the student to achieve as a result of instruction in the program. The theoretical and conceptual models for instructing these students in the classroom vary from program to program.

The quality of service delivered to students in the classroom is dependent on the training and experience of those classroom personnel employed to staff those classrooms. Swan, Purvis and Wood (1987) found that 93% of the teachers in the GPN held state teacher certification in the area of behavior disorders or behavior disorders interrelated; the remaining 7% had appropriate certification in related areas. Preservice training provides the basis of training for teaching personnel, but continuing staff development "should lead to the improvement of student learning" (Wiles & Bondi, 1986, p. 219). The GPN provides opportunities for continued staff development through four major activities: the GPN Annual Staff Development Conference, the Autism Conference, the Psychoeducational/Behavior Disorders Conference, and the GPN Preschool Conference.

The passage of Public Law 94-142 created a significantly increased need for trained teachers of handicapped youngsters. Although colleges and universities educate teachers to instruct handicapped students, the content of training varies. Once a teacher is employed in a

local system, the employing system is required to provide on-going staff development for personnel who are employed to meet the needs of handicapped students. This is true for the GPN Programs, as the teaching staff employed must be trained to meet the needs of the SED/SBD students they serve.

The requirements to develop a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, under Public Law 94-142, were developed on the premise "that the quality of services for handicapped children is dependent upon the competency of those who administer and provide such service" (Grosenick & Huntze, 1982, p. 1). The National Needs Analysis Project in Behavior Disorders began collecting information in 1979 on "state of the art" in behavior disorders. One major finding of this project was the need for greater efforts in the area of personnel development. Russell and Williams (1984) concluded that, although teacher training programs in behavior disorders addressed training needs in 27 identified competencies, the degree to which these competencies were addressed needed further investigation. In addition, teachers in behavior disorders were found to believe a need for further training existed even after completing a college program in behavior disorders (Russell & Williams, 1984). Kelly (1988) studied the training needs for a limited number of experienced and inexperienced teachers in the GPN and found that this group of GPN teachers identified training needs in strategies that could be used in the classroom (e.g., physical restraint, curriculum development, etc.). A statewide needs assessment in Georgia found that eligibility determination, transition, assessing instructional levels, evaluating student progress and use of data, and designing alternative teaching strategies were all priorities of behavior disorders teachers surveyed (Georgia Department of Education, 1986). These personnel needs assessments are conducted every other year.

Current research shows that teachers need further training beyond college and that specific competencies can be identified for behavior disorders teachers that are believed to be significant training needs (Grosenick & Huntze, 1982; Russell & Williams, 1984). Although Kelly (1988) provided data on the training needs of GPN teachers, the results are limited because of the small sample size. However, an important training need for teachers of SED/SBD students in the area of instruction was found – how to teach SED/SBD students and what to teach SED/SBD students. While past research has focused on the identification of competencies needed by behavior disorders staff, this study focused on training needs as reported by GPN teachers only and how those training needs might differ based upon specific demographics of student age and program region.

Method

The purpose of this study was to describe the training needs as reported by fully certified behavior disorders GPN teachers in three areas: 1) experienced (four years or more in a classroom within the GPN) and inexperienced (three years or less in a classroom within the GPN); 2) Program regions (Rural and Rural-Suburban, Urban and Urban-Suburban, and Rural-Suburban-Urban); and 3) students' service delivery ages (birth through four, 5 through 14, and 15 through 21). Only GPN teachers fully certified by the Georgia Department of Education in behavior disorders were selected as subjects for this study. These fully certified GPN teachers were then divided into two subgroups. One subgroup was labeled as experienced and consisted of teachers with four or more years of experience teaching SBD/SED students in the GPN. The other subgroup was labeled as inexperienced and consisted of teachers with

three years or less experience teaching SBD/SED students in the GPN.

Individual school systems were classified in regard to setting by utilizing the criteria available in the *Georgia County Guide* (University of Georgia, 1987). The *Georgia County Guide* describes areas of the state in relation to their population. A Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is defined as an area which "has one or more central counties containing the area's main population concentration; an urbanized area with at least 50,000 inhabitants. An MSA may also include outlying counties which have close economic and social relationships with the central counties" (University of Georgia, 1987, p. 164). Individual school systems can be described as urban, rural, or suburban based upon that school system's location inside, proximity to, or outside an MSA. For this study, urban school systems are defined as school systems located in an MSA; suburban school systems are defined as school systems not located in an MSA but contiguous with school systems located within an MSA; rural school systems are defined as school systems neither located in an MSA nor contiguous with school systems located within an MSA. Based upon the individual school systems served, the 24 GPN Programs were grouped into five region designations: Rural, Urban, Urban-Suburban, Rural-Suburban, and Rural-Suburban-Urban. For example, a regional GPN Program classified as Urban-Suburban would be located in an area that serves individual school systems that are both urban and suburban. For the purposes of this study, the five region designations were collapsed into three region designations: Rural and Rural-Suburban, Urban and Urban-Suburban, and Rural-Suburban-Urban. Table 1 provides a listing of the 24 individual GPN Programs and their region classifications.

The Training Needs Questionnaire (TNQ) (see Appendix), used in this study, was designed to determine content/skill areas which were reported by GPN teachers as high or low priority needs for staff development. Each content/skill area presented an area of possible training need for a teacher's ongoing staff development. The instrument was developed by selecting items from instruments previously used in four related studies (Grosenick & Huntze, 1982; Grosenick & Huntze, 1983; Kelly, 1988; and Russell & Williams, 1984) and a training needs questionnaire utilized by the Developmental Therapy Institute (Wood, 1980). Teachers were asked to rate each item on a scale from one to five; one being low priority need for staff development and five being high priority need for staff development. A test-retest reliability study using a sample of 23 fully certified teachers yielded a Pearson *r* correlation of .87.

Results

Table 2 shows demographics of the respondents relating to experience level of the respondents, the number of respondents based upon location of the Program in which they teach, and the number of respondents based upon the service delivery age of the students taught. Only those TNQs from respondents who were fully certified in behavior disorders were used in the data analysis. Due to the small number of teachers who teach a combination of student ages ($n = 6$), they were not included in the data analysis for service delivery age.

In order to summarize the wealth of data in this study, the items comprising TNQ have been categorized into five broad categories of training emphasis. The broad areas and related items are: Teacher Skills for Instruction, Curriculum Issues, Special Education Due Process Issues, Personal Development Issues for Teachers, and Student and Teacher Support Services. By placing the highest priority (one through nine) training needs reported by GPN teachers in these categories, a broad categorical training focus emerges. Table 3 describes the number

Table 1
Classification of the GPN Programs Related to Setting

Program	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Alpine		x	x
Burwell		x	x
Cedarwood	x	x	
Chatham-Effingham			x
Child & Adolescent	x	x	x
Cobb-Douglas			x
Comprehensive	x		
DeKalb-Rockdale			x
Flint Area	x	x	
Golden Isles	x	x	
Griffin Area	x	x	x
Harrell	x		
Heart of GA	x	x	
Middle GA		x	x
No. Metro			x
Northwest	x	x	x
Oak Tree	x	x	x
Oconee	x	x	
Ogeechee	x	x	
Rutland	x	x	x
Sand Hills	x	x	x
So. Metro			x
Southwest	x	x	
Woodall	x	x	x

of highest priority items in each category by experience levels, program regions, and service delivery ages. Two categories can be identified as having the most need for training – Teacher Skills for Instruction and Curriculum Issues. Special Education Due Process Issues and Personal Development Issues for Teachers have a low need for training.

Discussion

This study found training needs for GPN teachers consistent with other needs assessment data. Training needs continue to be found in the area of social skills/affective education and strategies for dealing with job related stress. Other training needs were found in the areas of techniques for motivating/rewarding students and individual counseling strategies.

Experienced GPN teachers reported training needs that conveyed a better understanding of and involvement with emotionally disturbed students, (i.e., entry/exit decisions, parent

involvement, discipline, mainstreaming, roles of other agencies, and medication). Inexperienced teachers reported training needs demonstrating concern regarding the classroom and the structure in that classroom. (i.e., individual education program development, behavior management strategies, strong self-concept as a teacher, and individualizing for student needs).

Training needs across regions were similar for the entire sample (i.e., social skills/affective education and strategies to improve students' self-concept). High training priorities (i.e., strategies dealing with job related stress and adaptability/patience) for inexperienced teachers in rural areas suggested a sense of isolation.

Table 2
Description of Fully Certified BD Respondents to TNQ

Experience Level	N	%
3 years or less	73	36.0
Over 4 years	130	64.0
Total	203	100.0

Program Location	N	%
Rural and Rural-Suburban	50	24.6
Urban and Urban-Suburban	111	54.7
Rural-Suburban-Urban	42	20.7
Total	203	100.0

Service Delivery Age	N	%
Preschool (Birth-four)	16	7.9
School Age (5-14)	110	54.1
Adolescent (15-21)	71	35.0
Combination of Ages	6	3.0
Total	203	100.0

Preschool teachers reported training needs different from both school age and adolescent teachers (i.e., parent involvement, consulting with other educators, roles of other agencies, individualizing to meet student needs, and locating materials). School age and adolescent teachers reported more common needs for training (i.e., social skills/affective education, individual counseling skills, strategies to improve students' self-concept) than uncommon needs.

These overall findings are consistent with other needs assessment data (Grosenick & Huntze, 1982; Kelly, 1988; Georgia Department of Education, 1986; Russell & Williams, 1984) which emphasize the need for increasing teacher instructional skills in the treatment of emotionally disturbed students. Curricula in the areas of social skills development and vocational/career education are consistently seen as a need across all teacher groups. The stress involved in the treatment of emotionally disturbed students is verified, because the need for training in strategies to reduce stress is also consistent across teacher groups. Preschool teachers reported a higher training need in the support areas than other groups reported. This may be due to the obvious difficulty in providing direct interaction with preschoolers or having more than merely infant stimulation activities. The emphasis most times is placed on support services for the preschooler both in and out of the home environment.

Table 3
Reported High Priority Training Needs by Categories

Training Categories	Exp	Inexp	R-RS	U-US	RSU	PS	SA	AD
Teacher Skills for Instruction								
Techniques for motivating/rewarding students	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Individual behavior management strategies (e.g., positive reinforcement, time-out, contracts, etc.)			x					
Individual counseling strategies (e.g., reality therapy, life space interviews, transactional analysis, play therapy, rational emotive therapy, etc.)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Group management/classroom management strategies (e.g., classroom meetings, cooperative learning, student grouping, etc.)		x	x					x
Strategies to improve student's self-concept	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Individualizing to meet student needs (e.g., learning styles, small group instruction, learning centers, etc.)		x				x		
Locating and utilizing appropriate materials in teaching	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Curriculum Issues								
Vocational preparation/career education	x	x	x	x	x			x
Social skills/affective education	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Special Education Due Process Issues								
No high priority items were identified in this category.								
Personal Development Issues for Teachers								
Strategies for coping with job related stress	x	x		x	x	x	x	
Student and Teacher Support Services								
Parent Involvement	x		x	x		x	x	
Consultation/collaboration with other educators	x			x		x	x	
Roles and functions of various agencies and programs (e.g., corrections, welfare, mental health, etc.)			x			x		
Interpreting and utilizing information on psychological and other reports					x	x		x
Medication (administration and effects)					x		x	x

Note: x = Identified as a high priority training need.

R-RS = Rural and Rural-Suburban; U-US = Urban and Urban-Suburban; RSU = Rural-Suburban-Urban

Exp = Experienced Teachers; Inexp = Inexperienced Teachers

PS = Preschool Teachers; SA = School Age Teachers; AD = Adolescent Teachers

Recommendations

Few differences were revealed in the training needs of GPN teachers by program setting and experience levels. Therefore, it would not be cost effective to schedule separate statewide staff development activities for GPN teachers based upon program settings or experience levels. The specific topics identified as training needs in this study could be incorporated into staff development activities at the individual program level or at annual statewide conferences. Because the greatest needs for training were found in Teacher Skills for Instruction and Curriculum Areas, the focus of statewide/affective education and individual counseling strategies might better be addressed at the GPN Annual Staff Development Conference, because the conference extends for more than one day and more focus could be placed on these topics. Other specific topics (e.g., strategies to improve self-concept and techniques for motivating/rewarding students) might better be addressed in shorter sessions similar to those provided at the winter Psychoeducational/Behavior Disorders Conference. Local Programs could best provide training in the areas dealing with job related stress and issues with inexperienced teachers.

Specific differences between the needs of preschool GPN teachers and other GPN teachers (i.e., school age and adolescent) were found; therefore, the continuance of a separate staff development activity is warranted. Reported training needs identified by this study will be made available to GPN Directors for incorporation into that activity.

Since Kelly's (1988) findings and Georgia Department of Education (1986) data are consistent with this study, a needs assessment of this type is not required annually. However, a triennial assessment of needs might provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of past staff development activities.

Considering the few differences found between groups and the study's overall consistency with past studies, it should not be replicated. However, the TNQ has been shown to be a valid instrument in effectively collecting training needs data on teachers within the GPN and may be used in future needs assessment activities.

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Appendix
Training Needs Questionnaire

Please complete this Questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope within two weeks of your receiving it. Please provide the following descriptive information of yourself:

Years of Teaching Experience: In the Psychoed Network: ___ In other Behavior Disorders Programs: ___
Certificate Held (check one or specify): T-5 BD __ T-5 Interrelated __ T-4 BD __ Other: __
Service Delivery Age for You in 1988-1989: (check your primary group):
Preschool (Birth-4) ___ School Age (5-14) ___ Adolescent (15-18) ___

Instructions: Please rate each content/skill area listed below by circling the number which corresponds to your need for staff development in that area. Rate each content/skill area from 1 (Low Priority = No need) to 5 (High Priority = Great Need).

Content/Skill Area	Priority Need for Staff Development				
	Low				High
1. Problem Solving Strategies in Education	1	2	3	4	5
2. Program Entry/Exit Decisions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Techniques for Motivating/Rewarding Students	1	2	3	4	5
4. Individual Education Program (IEP) Development	1	2	3	4	5
5. Parent Involvement	1	2	3	4	5
6. Vocational Preparation/Career Education	1	2	3	4	5
7. Social Skills/Affective Education	1	2	3	4	5
8. Individual Behavior Management Strategies (e.g., Positive Reinforcement, Time-out, Contracts, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Individual Counseling Strategies (e.g., Reality Therapy, Life Space Interviews, Transactional Analysis, Play Therapy, Rational Emotive Therapy, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Group Management/Classroom Management Strategies (e.g., Classroom Meetings, Cooperative Learning, Student Grouping, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
11. Environmental Management (e.g., Seating Arrangements, Scheduling, Task Analysis and Organization, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
12. Strategies for Coping with Job Related Stress	1	2	3	4	5
13. Consultation/Collaboration with Other Educators	1	2	3	4	5
14. Flexibility/Adaptability/Patience in Teaching	1	2	3	4	5
15. Discipline, Suspension and Expulsion	1	2	3	4	5
16. Strong Self-Concept and Confidence as a Teacher	1	2	3	4	5
17. Integrating/Mainstreaming Students	1	2	3	4	5
18. Ability to Sense and Use Humor in School Situations	1	2	3	4	5

Training Needs Questionnaire *Continued*

Content/Skill Area	Priority Need for Staff Development				
	Low				High
19. Roles and Functions of Various Agencies and Programs (e.g., Corrections, Welfare, Mental Health, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
20. Empathy/Warmth/Enjoyment in Relationships with Students	1	2	3	4	5
21. Using Developmental Therapy Techniques	1	2	3	4	5
22. Physical Restraint Techniques	1	2	3	4	5
23. Interpreting and Utilizing Information on Psychological and Other Reports	1	2	3	4	5
24. Strategies to Improve Student's Self Concept	1	2	3	4	5
25. Medication (Administration and Effects)	1	2	3	4	5
26. Individualizing to Meet Student Needs (e.g., Learning Styles, Small Group Instruction, Learning Centers, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
27. Locating and Utilizing Appropriate Materials in Teaching	1	2	3	4	5

GPN Research Report
#89-001, 4, 1989

GPN Program Needs Assessments: Three Examples

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A needs assessment process used with three Programs in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network is described in terms of purpose and importance, strategic characteristics, and procedures – including questionnaires and site visit schedules. Three Program perspectives are provided which include selected aspects of the process – background, preparation, strengths, and recommendations for improvement. Recommendations for improving the process are based on these Program perspectives. A critical aspect to conducting this process successfully is the individualization of this process for each Program.

The general purpose of a needs assessment is to develop priorities and goals for future program improvement based on current and specific programmatic concerns, operations and processes; recognized program and personnel strengths; individual personnel concerns; and other relevant factors such as effectively implementing state/federal rules, regulations, and/or other requirements (Burrello & Sage, 1979; Trohanis, 1985). The continuing emphasis on accountability and effectiveness has encouraged leaders to investigate program improvement on a periodic basis. This is evidenced by the priority on strategic planning for all educational leaders, systems, and programs as specified in Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act (1985).

Concerning special education in particular, Burrello and Zadnik (1985) identified several factors which are critical to the success of special education leaders in conducting quality programs for exceptional students and their families. These factors include planning for both short and long range; evaluating programs on a consistent, formal, and periodic basis; being a catalyst for staff on program development activities; engaging in personal and professional risk taking by promoting and supporting innovative programming; and creating a climate of shared decision making to utilize the talents of all staff in the organization. The formal statement on effectiveness indicators for special education (The National RRC Panel on Indicators of Effectiveness in Special Education, 1986) includes two indicators of effective planning – the completion of needs assessments to provide data for annual and long-term planning and the use of such plans for continuous policy and program development and ongoing decision-

making. Assessing needs is one means of focusing program improvement for handicapped students and their families.

During the past two years, three GPN Programs (Programs) have conducted needs assessments, based on common methods, to improve the quality of their programs. The purpose of this article is to describe the common methodology (strategy and procedures), to provide perspectives from the three GPN directors of Programs which have completed needs assessments, and to provide recommendations for improvement of the methodology for other Programs which may conduct needs assessments in the future.

Methodology

Strategy

The strategy for conducting the needs assessments with the Programs included four major characteristics common to effective needs assessments. First, the needs assessment was focused on topics critical to the Program (Burrello & Sage, 1979; Trohanis, 1985). An individualized structured format, including both specific questions and more open-ended questions, was developed for each Program. Second, an opportunity for an individual face-to-face interview was provided for every professional, support, and clerical staff member (Trohanis, 1985). Personnel included custodians, clerical/ support staff, support teachers and paraprofessionals, teacher therapists, psychologists, social/parent workers, infant program personnel, coordinators, directors, and others associated with the Program. This individual emphasis is consistent with the current emphasis in the research literature on collegiality and site-based or school-based management (Glickman, 1989). Third, an external team comprised of experts in GPN Programs conducted the needs assessment (Lambour, Rostetter, Sapir, & Taha, 1980). Advantages of using an external team include bringing a fresh perspective and specialized expertise to the assessment, isolation from internal politics, and having only limited ego-involvement in the status quo. Fourth, the results of the needs assessment were presented, both verbally in a large group meeting at the conclusion of the assessment and in writing as a follow-up to that meeting, to all those who participated in the assessment (Trohanis, 1985).

Procedures

Several procedures were common across these needs assessments. First, each needs assessment was requested by the director, generally in response to requests from staff members about particular concerns evidenced in the Program operations. Second, a leader of the Needs Assessment Team (Team) was selected by the GPN director; the Team leader and the GPN director planned the strategy and the procedures for the needs assessment in a collaborative manner. Third, the assessments were conducted by an external team comprised of one GPN Program director, a director of special education, and a university professor. Based on unique needs and preferences of a Program, other personnel on the teams included another GPN director, a school psychologist, and a doctoral student. All personnel were selected collaboratively by the GPN Program director (with input from staff) and the Needs Assessment Team leader (the university professor served this role in all three assessments). Each Team member had significant experience with GPN Programs and in the education of severely emotionally disturbed/severely behavior disordered (SED/SBD) students.

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Fourth, a structured interview questionnaire was devised by the Program director and the Team for each needs assessment to provide a framework for discussing *both* strengths and needs of a Program (see Figure 1 for a sample questionnaire). There was a balance between identifying needs and means to respond to those needs and identifying strengths inasmuch as information on strengths is generally relegated to a minor statement in many needs assessments. Fifth, the opportunity to be interviewed by one Team member for approximately one-half hour in a quiet place was provided to each staff member. Each staff member was assured that all information obtained by the Team would be confidential, i.e., no names would be associated with any information shared. Further, interviews were conducted with the local fiscal agent superintendent and other school district personnel as appropriate. Sixth, a schedule was prepared for conducting the interviews at both the main Program location and all satellite locations and for providing feedback to the staff (see Figure 2 for a sample). The schedule included specific times to interview each staff member. Time was also scheduled to allow staff members to talk with Team members in a group forum.

Seventh, Team findings and recommendations were shared with all Program staff in two ways. Subsequent to the completion of the interviews and deliberations by the Team, a verbal report was presented by the Team to all Program participants at the end of the needs assessment. A question and answer session followed the presentation. Within five weeks of the needs assessment, a written report was completed and forwarded in draft form to the GPN director for review and discussion. The written document included the following: an executive summary (two to three pages), a purpose statement, an overview/summary, a listing of strengths, a statement of recommendations with rationale for each, a listing of all persons interviewed, a listing of the team members, and copies of the schedule and interview questionnaire. The draft report was provided to facilitate discussions about key words, factual inaccuracies, or confusing phrasing among any of those who might read the report. The draft was then revised based on feedback from the Team members to the Program staff's reactions/responses. A final report was then forwarded to the Program director for use and dissemination.

Eighth, the costs for completing the needs assessments were minimized by paying only for Team members' travel/per diem expenses and an honorarium to the chair of the Team for the organizational effort and for producing a written report.

Program Perspectives

While there were common elements in the needs assessments across the three Programs, there were unique aspects to each as well. The following are perspectives from the directors of each of the three Programs concerning their needs assessment.

Rutland Psychoeducational Services

Background. Rutland Psychoeducational Services (RPS) serves thirteen school systems through a main program in Athens and multiple outpost locations in five school systems. Services began in 1970 and have adapted over the years to meet the changing student and Program needs and requirements in the school systems served.

The purpose of the needs assessment was to review the current operation of RPS and provide recommendations for improvement. The decision to focus on the internal operations of RPS was the director's, based on his perception of the most critical needs of RPS at that

Figure 1
Sample Needs Assessment Questionnaire

Person Interviewed: _____ Interviewer: _____

1. What are you hoping will result from this needs assessment?

2. What is your philosophy of treatment for the students served by your Program?

3. Name three major successes of the Program:

a.
b.
c.

4. Name three major needs of the Program:

a.
b.
c.

5. How effective is the communication between your Program and local school system personnel?

6. What would you change at the Program to make it a better working environment for you?

7. What information/data do you have to indicate that your Program is effective with students?

8. How would you change the current organization to improve services to the students served in your location?

9. How could you assist your Program in being more effective?

10. What other information would you care to share that I have not asked for?

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Figure 2
Sample Needs Assessment Schedule

Day 1

9:00 PM Team convenes with Team Leader to Review Expectations, Schedule, Procedures, and Assignments

Day 2

7:30 AM Team Meets with Director and Coordinators to Finalize All Arrangements (Breakfast at Motel)

8:15 AM Team Members Depart for Interview Sites

9:00 AM Team Interviews GPN Program Staff Members. Interviews Are Conducted on Location with Educational Lead and Support Therapists, Psychologist(s), Social Workers, Program Evaluators, Secretaries, Other School Staff; Principals and Other School Staff in Satellite Locations

Main Program and Satellites

Main Program	Satellite #1	Satellite #2	Satellite #3
Team Member #1	Team Member #2	Team Member #3	Team Member #4

12:00 Noon Lunch on Site

Team Members Continue Interviews

3:30 PM Each Team Member Conducts Open Forum on Location *or* Team Conducts One Open Forum at Central Location to Provide Opportunity for Sharing Perceptions Not Shared in Any Other Way

5:00 PM Team Convenes to Discuss Interviews and Trends

Day 3

7:30 AM Team Convenes to Refine Activities for the Day (Over Breakfast)

8:30 AM Team Interviews Director, Coordinators, and Continues Interviews with Staff Members

12:00 Noon Lunch

1:00 PM Team Convenes to Discuss Results and Develop Recommendations

2:30 PM Team Meets with Director and Coordinators to Review Results and Recommendations

3:30 PM Team Presents Results and Recommendations to All Program Staff with Question and Answer Session

4:30 PM Team Departs

Anticipated Reporting Schedule

2 Weeks: Draft report prepared and distributed to all Team members by the Team leader

2 Weeks: Leader receives feedback from Team members

1 Week: Final draft report is developed and forwarded to the GPN Program director and the Team members

2 Weeks: Leader receives feedback on final draft report from GPN Program director and Team members

1 Week: Final report forwarded to GPN Program director and Team members by leader

time.

Follow-up results. Significant progress has been made toward reaching the goals stated in the needs assessment. An Administrative Team and a Leadership Team have been implemented and are working effectively in implementing a shared decision making management style. The Leadership Team is becoming frustrated due to the specific as well as the general nature of the items it has considered. Determining which issues the Leadership Team will consider has been difficult and additional definition of which issues will be considered by which Team is needed. It is suggested that other programs considering moving towards a shared decision making approach employ a part-time consultant to assist with this process.

A follow-up needs assessment by the same external team which conducted the original needs assessment is recommended in the future. The purpose of such a follow-up would be to document progress which can be overlooked by the staff involved in the slow process of change.

Recommendations for improvement. While the needs assessment identified significant strengths of the program and was generally effective, there are several areas in which improvements should be considered. First, during the preparation period prior to the needs assessment, organized efforts must be made to inform staff regarding the purpose(s) of the needs assessment, the process to be utilized in conducting the needs assessment, and the expectations regarding the contents/format of the needs assessment report including time lines. Second, program strengths should be both specific and general. Significant attention must be placed on identifying and citing strengths as many people may take such strengths for granted. Third, recommendations for improvement should be both specific and general. Recommendations of a similar nature, e.g., buying equipment, should be grouped together. Perhaps reference should be made to appendices for details when the list of specifics is lengthy. The list of general recommendations should be precise yet comprehensive. Fourth, follow-up/implementation activities should occur as soon as possible. Needs assessments should be scheduled early in the year in order that some objectives can be met before the year is over. The summer seemed to be a break in the process for RPS.

Alpine Psychoeducational Program

Background. The Alpine Psychoeducational Program serves 14 county and city school systems in northern Georgia in seven program sites – a main program and six outposts. The needs assessment was requested to begin an examination of program operations and develop clear emphases for future program development.

Preparation. Meetings/discussions were conducted to inform all staff of the needs assessment. Questions concerning the process/format of the needs assessment were answered by administrators for several weeks prior to the site visit.

Strengths. The needs assessment provided objective observations and analysis of the Program's operation. The Needs Assessment Team was comprised of professionals in special education who were aware of the problems or unique tasks being evaluated. The interviewing procedure was generally non-threatening and there was a minimum of interruption of classroom routines. All staff were involved in the process, and the director of the RESA which serves as fiscal agent was included as an interviewee. The individual interviews with all staff enabled the Team to generate recommendations that were very beneficial and credible. The Needs Assessment Team provided feedback, both verbally in the exit interview and in written form in the report, in a timely manner. All staff became more aware of the entire Program's functions and interactions. The needs assessment was a morale booster for Program staff. The

written report has enabled staff to use a list of priorities to focus efforts on program improvement. It has been used as a framework to begin work on specific recommendations.

Follow-up results. The Program staff have been assigned to work on implementing particular recommendations from the needs assessment. The administrative staff formally address, on a scheduled basis, the progress toward implementing the recommendations. The needs assessment provided the impetus for all staff to review where they were and the opportunity for them to become active participants regarding decisions of future directions in the Alpine Psychoeducational Program.

Recommendations for improvement. Additional time should be focused on preparing staff for the process of the needs assessment. While the anxieties of staff were dispelled once the process began and they knew what to expect, more discussions or information prior to the visit would serve to reduce anxieties before the process begins. A needs assessment process such as this one should become an integral part of program operations for all GPN Programs. A continuing examination of a Program from an external perspective using internal perceptions provides a continuity for focused efforts on improving program operations.

Griffin Area Psychoeducational Program

Background. The Griffin Area Psychoeducational Program (GAPP) serves nine school systems through three program sites. Services began in 1975 and in the subsequent years the Program has experienced an increased demand for services. Two of the fastest growing counties in Georgia are a part of the service area, and student growth has placed greater expectations at a time when financial resources have diminished. The critical aspects of this issue prompted the Director of GAPP to request a needs assessment. It was anticipated that through this approach, a strategic plan based on program needs could result. Two objectives were: to identify strengths and limitations of the program, including suggestions for remediation, skill building, and/or enhancement; and to identify ways to increase services to students in an era of limited funds and continuing fiscal constraints.

Preparation. Three steps comprised the preparation for this needs assessment. First, an external team leader was identified and commitment obtained to lead the assessment. Second, team membership was negotiated jointly between the director and the team leader along with specification of dates, schedule, and procedures for the assessment. An important variable with this step was to assure that persons were selected who respected each other and could work together as a team. Third, staff were prepared for the needs assessment by introducing the concept and reviewing the purposes, schedule, and procedures. Confidentiality of responses from staff members was emphasized. The survey was distributed to staff members prior to the needs assessment to allow them sufficient time for thoughtful consideration of their perceptions.

Strengths of the needs assessment. There were five primary strengths for this needs assessment. First, the assessment was objective and the process was fair. Second, the results were credible; therefore the staff placed more value on the action plan to improve or initiate suggestions based on their participation in the assessment and their ownership of the results. Third, it provided external, objective perceptions of critical program variables which allowed the director to work effectively with other school personnel (e.g., superintendents, special education directors) in responding to areas needing improvement. Fourth, the process allows for consideration of the information by the executive officer to highlight what is perceived to be vital (or not vital) to the program. Fifth, the assessment provided valuable information to

support decision-making for allocating new space by considering all the needs rather than listening to "organizationally effective" subgroups.

Follow-up results. Several significant actions were taken as a result of the needs assessment. First, the final written report was shared with staff and initial changes were made to accommodate perceived needs in the Program. The results were also shared with the Advisory Board (superintendents of school systems) concerning the previously identified need for additional personnel to provide services to SED/SBD students. Money has now been provided by the school systems to hire an additional therapist. Third, the space which was desperately needed by the program was provided and a previously vacant, now rennovated building was occupied by GAPP in July, 1989. Fourth, a planning retreat was held in June of 1989 with GAPP leadership staff. Two days were spent in reviewing evaluative data (e.g., needs assessment, survey of parents and schools, monitoring results), and the result was an annual plan with goals, objectives, and timelines. With this method as a central theme to leadership, GAPP is now more involved in and directed by collaborative planning.

Recommendations for improvement. Based on the results of this particular needs assessment, there are three major recommendations for improvement. First, additional effort should be made to more effectively prepare staff to reduce their anxiety levels. While the staff were reasonably well prepared, the anxiety level of working with an external team for a needs assessment was much higher than anticipated. Second, the team should devise a systematic way to identify the percentage of staff who make similar comments/responses to assist in prioritizing concerns, needs, issues, and alternative resolutions. And third, the staff should be asked to provide an evaluation of the process once it is completed.

Recommendations for Improvement of Needs Assessment Process

Based on the Program perspectives, there are several recommendations for improving this process. First, additional effort should be made to inform staff early in the process of the purposes, procedures, timelines, and expectations of the needs assessment. One means of accomplishing this might be including staff representation of all Program components in the planning and implementation of the needs assessment. Second, Program strengths should be identified and emphasized. Although strengths are often cited, most who read reports tend to focus on the recommendations rather than the strengths. Significant time in discussions and space in reports should be allocated to discussing strengths. Third, the needs assessment team should devise a means to prioritize concerns, needs, issues, and alternative resolutions based on the percentage of staff reflecting each. Fourth, needs assessment reports should specify suggested timelines for implementation. If possible, implementation of needs assessment results and recommendations should be in a timely fashion so activities can be directed to respond to needs.

Summary

This needs assessment process, with unique adaptation for each Program, provides a viable means to consider program improvements from both the internal perspective of those integrally involved with a Program and an external perspective of a Needs Assessment Team com-

prised of experienced special education leaders from other relevant positions in the state. The individualization of the process to meet the local parameters is critical to the successful implementation of this process.

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GPN Research Report
#89-001, 4, 1989

The Training Needs of Parents of Students in Programs for Severe Emotional Disturbance, Behavior Disorders and Preschool Handicapped[1]

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A 23 item survey was distributed to parents to assess their perceived needs for training. Completed surveys were received from 19 parents of students classified as having severe emotional disturbance (SED), 85 parents of students classified as having behavior disorders (BD), and 9 parents of students served in preschool projects. All three groups of parents expressed a need for assistance in managing their handicapped child. Parents of SED students tended to select items which involved external control of the child, and parents of BD students were somewhat more likely to select more internal management items. Other results are reported along with possible steps for implementing parent training programs.

It is a generally accepted principle, both as mandated by P.L. 94-142 and as sound educational planning among special educators, that parents should be involved in the educational programs of their children (Karnes & Lee, 1980; Lillie, 1976). There is probably no area of special education in which working with parents is more important than in behavior disorders/severe emotional disturbance. Parent involvement has, for example, become an emerging component in the behavioral treatment of autistic children (Korgel, Screibman, Johnson, O'Neill & Dunlap, 1984). It is assumed that by training parents to become part of a broad-based educational program beyond just the legal requirements of the law, parents can play a major role in teaching and managing their handicapped children (Winton, 1986).

Karnes and Lee (1980) list three assumptions which they feel serve as the rationale for a parent training program:

1. Parents are interested in the growth of their handicapped child and would be motivated to learn new skills to promote their child's learning and development.
2. Parents will find the time to become involved in their child's educational program, if the involvement makes sense to them.
3. Parents will become involved to the extent they participate in the decision making.

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[1]This project was funded by the Georgia Department of Education with P.L. 94-142 funds through the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Committee of the State Advisory Panel for Special Education.

A fourth reason that should be added to the list for students with emotional/behavioral problems is that parent participation in managing the behavior of a student with emotional/behavioral problems is a major component of an effective intervention program.

Parental input into the content of parent training programs is a critical component because without parental input, educators risk placing a value judgment on deciding what help parents need (Kaplan, 1980) as well as lacking the needed data for establishing clear, appropriate objectives (Hopkins, 1984; Dangel & Polster, 1984). The purpose of the following survey was to solicit input from parents regarding their perceived need for training.

Method

During the Spring of 1988, the State Advisory Panel for Special Education of the Georgia Department of Education authorized a survey to assess the training needs of parents of handicapped children. Most of the surveys were distributed through the 17 Georgia Learning Resource Centers (GLRS) and were given to a sample of parents at the annual spring Individualized Education Program (IEP) review meeting with their child's special education teacher. The surveys were distributed so that the sample reflected the geographic regions and prevalence rates of special education students in Georgia. Surveys were also distributed through six parent advocacy groups and nine preschool projects throughout the state – four of the preschool projects were directed by psychoeducational programs (Georgia Department of Education, 1988).

Respondents

A total of 1149 surveys were returned which represents over 1% of the families of handicapped students in Georgia. That total included 19 responses from parents of students classified as having severe emotional disturbance (SED) and 85 parents of students served in

Table 1
Characteristics of Students

	Years of Special Education Service				
	0-1	2-3	4-6	7-9	10+
Severe Emotional Disturbance	1	7	7	1	2
BehaviorDisorders	16	36	14	11	4

	Grade Level of Student			
	K	1-3	4-8	9-12
Severe Emotional Disturbance	1	7	8	2
Behavior Disorders	5	29	31	15

Note: Not all respondents marked these items

classes for students with behavior disorders (BD). Based on state incidence figures, it was projected that these groups would represent 16% of the total responses (183 parents), although actual responses only totaled 9% (104 responses). In addition to the SED/BD groups, there were also responses from 9 parents of children served in Georgia preschool projects (one of the preschool respondents indicated the child was classified as BD).

Table 1 reports the grade levels and years of service which parents indicated for their children who were in SED and BD programs. Most parents indicated that their child has been in the special class program for between two or three years. The parents' responses describing the grade-level of their children indicated they were about evenly distributed between grades 1-3 and 4-8. The relatively small number of parents who indicated that their child was in grades 9-12 is probably a reflection of the low attendance of these parents at IEP review conferences.

Results

The responses from the parents of SED, BD and preschool children were ranked by frequency and are reported in Table 2. The mean number of SED parents and BD parents who responded to the items was 34.5% and 37.1% respectively. These numbers were not significantly different ($t = .420; p = .677$). The percentage of the responses of parents of SED and BD students to items selected as areas in which they needed training was tested for proportionality using the chi square test. The resulting analysis indicated that the two parent groups differed significantly in the proportion of responses for these items (chi square = 78.5; $p < .0001$).

As would be expected, items which dealt with child management skills were identified as areas of need by most parents of SED and BD students as well as parents of children in the preschool projects. The items "Having Your Child Obey" (79% of the SED parents, 53% of the BD parents, and 63% of preschool parents), "Having Your Child Take Responsibility" (63% SED, 76% BD, and 58% preschool), and "Motivating Your Child" (47% SED, 69% BD,and 63% preschool) were three of the six most frequently selected areas for parent training for the three groups. Parents of children in preschool projects selected the item "Developing Learning Activities to Support School Work" more often than they selected any other item.

Items which involved dealing directly with the school and their child's educational program were seldom selected by the SED parents. For example, "Communicating with Your Child's Teacher" (16%), "Understanding Test Results Used for Placement" (11%), "Developing IEPs and Other Educational Plans" (11%), and "Resolving Differences with Your Child's School" (5%) were four of the five least frequently selected items by parents of SED students. Parents of BD students and children in preschool projects also tended not to select these items as often as other items, although these parents did select school-related items more often than parents of SED students. For example, parents of BD students selected "Understanding Placement Tests" (their twelfth most frequently selected item) three times as often and "Resolving Differences with the School" (their twentieth most frequently selected item) four times as often as parents of SED students.

On the other hand, parents of students in SED programs were more likely to select items dealing with a need for help outside of school more often than parents of BD students. "Finding Help in the School and Community" was the second most frequently selected item (68%), "Finding Leisure-time Activities" the fifth most frequently selected item (63%), and "Planning Your Child's Financial Future" (47%) the seventh most frequently selected item by parents of SED students. Conversely, these items were the seventh (46%), eleventh (36%), and

Table 2
Cross-Tabulation of Exceptionality and Training Areas Reported as Percentages (n=122)

	Severely Emotionally Disturbed		Behavior Disorders		Preschool Handicapped	
Number Responding =	19		85		9	
	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank
Having Child Obey	79	1	53	5	63	2*
Finding Help in Sch./Comm.	68	2	46	7	47	9
Having Child Take Responsib.	63	3*	76	1	58	5*
Disciplining Child	63	3*	58	4	58	5*
Finding Leisure-time Activ.	63	5	36	11	58	5*
Motivating Your Child	47	6*	69	2	63	2*
Planning Financial Future	47	6*	31	13	42	11
Counseling for Child/Family	47	6*	41	10	26	16
Developing Act. Soc. Growth	42	9	66	3	63	3
Dev. Act. to Support School	37	10*	53	6	74	1
Establishing Rules	37	10*	44	8	53	8
Understanding Medication	37	10*	15	21	11	22
Dev. Plans for Transition	32	13	44	9	15	21
Using Microcomputers	21	14*	21	18*	21	19
Dev. Play Act./Materials	21	14*	21	18*	47	10
Living with Teen-ager	16	16*	31	14	0	0
Understanding Due Process	16	16*	27	15	37	13
Selecting Equip/Tech/Toys	16	16*	14	22	26	17
Communicating w/Teacher	16	16*	26	16	32	15
Understand Placement Tests	11	20*	32	12	42	12
Develop IEP & ED. Plans	11	20*	24	17	32	14
Resolving Differ. w/School	5	22	20	20	16	20
Toilet Training	0	23	5	23	26	18

One preschool child was BD
Chi square = 78.5; $p < .0001$
*indicates tied ranks

thirteenth (31%) most frequently selected items by parents of students in BD classes. Parents of BD students selected "Developing Activities to Promote Social Growth" (66%) more frequently than parents of SED students (42%).

Only two of the parents of SED students and ten parents of BD students indicated that they had attended a parent workshop within the previous year. This represents less than 12% of the parents in these two groups. No data on workshop participation were available for preschool parents. Ninety percent of the parents who attended a workshop rated the workshop as good or excellent.

Written Comments

Only eight of the 122 parents wrote comments about their needs, in addition to completing the survey. Of these comments, three asked for information about when parent workshops would be offered in their area, while others asked for information on alternatives to medication, help with their own self-control, and information on how to motivate their child.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that the parents of children served in programs for SED and BD students, as well as parents of children in preschool projects, expressed a need for help in managing their handicapped child. Similar needs were expressed for some of the highest ranked items among the three parent groups.

A possible difference between the parents of SED and BD students in responding to the management items was that more parents of SED students tended to select items which involved external control of the child (i.e., "Having Your Child Obey" and "Disciplining Your Child") than did parents of BD students. The parents of BD students were somewhat more likely to select more internal control management items (i.e., "Having Your Child Take Responsibility" and "Motivating Your Child"). It is not possible to know whether these differences are merely the result of sampling or represent a "true difference" between the two groups of parents.

It does seem evident that most parents were not interested in training in school related topics – especially parents of SED students. A possible exception to this is the item "Understand Test Results Used for Placement" for parents of BD and preschool students (32% and 42% respectively selected this item). There will, of course, be individual parents who will need to have training with areas related to dealing with the schools, even though the group surveyed did not frequently select these items.

One way to interpret the differences in the responses between parents of SED and BD children is to view them as a continuum of severity. That is to say, as the severity of the problem increases (i.e., SED) there is more of an expressed need for help with external controls (e.g., "Having Child Obey," "Finding Help in the School and Community," and "Disciplining Your Child") and less concern with the school and its programs (e.g., "Understanding Placement Tests"). Viewed in this way, parents of SED and BD students are seen as having similar needs, but with a shift in the focus to the degree in which they perceive that they, as opposed to others, can meet their child's needs.

Possible Steps for Implementation of Parent Training Programs

This needs assessment survey provides a first step for the development of parent training programs by outlining general need areas. The development of parent training programs might follow these steps:

1. Needs assessment data which indicate areas in which parents need training would be collected. This survey provides a general focus from which needs surveys for a specific program could be developed and refined. Parent advisory committees also may be helpful in identifying specific needs (Dangel & Polster, 1984).

2. The general need areas would then be refined into specific objectives. For example, the broadly stated item, "Having Child Take Responsibility," may be refined into focusing on getting dressed in time to catch the school bus.

3. Students' programs of intervention at school would be coordinated with the objectives of the parent training program. This would be done through an analysis of students' needs, especially goals and objectives on Individualized Educational Programs. For example, if a psychoeducational program serving adolescents were emphasizing a homework program to promote the school coping skills necessary for transition back to a regular program, the item "Develop Learning Activities to Support School Work" might be refined into a training program in strategies for assisting and monitoring their child's homework.

4. Involve parents in the planning by having parents continue to provide input and support for parent training programs. Parents may be asked to serve on administrative or advisory counsels which plan parent training, serve as counselors to work with other parents, and participate in evaluating any parent-training program (Karnes & Lee, 1980).

The underlying component to any parent training program would be involvment of parents with the special education staff. The paradox for those working with students with behavior problems is that in a field where parent involvement is most critical, evidence of participation is very limited.

Limitations/Caveats

As with any survey data, these data must be interpreted in light of the parents who responded. First, the 19 parents of students in SED programs are a very small number and may not be representative of the general population of parents. They were, of course, those who attended the spring IEP review, which makes them a select group. Also, they elected to take the time to complete the survey and to return it. On the other hand, their level of involvement also suggests that they are probably more likely than other parents to participate in any parent training program. The 85 parents of BD students represent a much more substantial sample, although still a select group. There were also very few parents whose children were enrolled in secondary programs, so we draw no conclusions about parents of this age student.

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GPN Research Report
#89-001, 4, 1989

An Initial Study to Describe Autistic Children in The Georgia Psychoeducational Network

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The purpose of this study was to provide an initial description of the autistic students served by the Georgia Psychoeducational Network in Fiscal Year 1989. These descriptors included gender, race, age group, custody, age at onset of abnormality, and type and length of services provided. Comparisons of these results to other research in the field are provided. This basic descriptive information is used as a basis to provide recommendations for future study.

A survey of current literature indicates that studies utilizing large samples of autistic students are very limited in number. The purpose of this study was to provide an initial description of the autistic students served in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network in Fiscal Year 89 (7/1/88-6/30/89) and compare those results with commonly accepted descriptors from other comparable research data.

Method

Questionnaire

Descriptors were obtained from the programs in the Network through the completion of a questionnaire for all students with a DSM III-R diagnosis of 299.00 or 299.80. Each of these students received services directly from Network Programs in therapeutic classes in FY 89. Descriptors included age group, gender, race, custody by age group, age of onset of abnormality, and services provided.

*This study was completed as part of a course offered at Mercer University for these students.

Sample

The sample for this study included 242 students (ages 3 through 21) with a DSM III-R diagnosis of 299.00 or 299.80 who were served in therapeutic classes by the programs in the Network from July 1, 1988 through June 30, 1989.

Results

Gender/Race/Age Group

Table 1 provides gender, race, and age group information about the 242 autistic students served. As indicated in Table 1, the data are grouped to describe the sample into gender (males, females), race (minority, white), and age group (preschool = 3 years, 0 months through 4 years 11 months; school-age = 5 years, 0 months through 14 years, 11 months; adolescent = 15 years, 0 months through 21 years, 11 months). As indicated in Table 1, the number of boys (n = 200) was greater than the number of girls (n = 42) by a 4:1 ratio. The number of minorities (n = 152) was greater than the number of whites and others (n = 90). The number of schoolage (5.0-14.11 years) children (n = 158) was greater than the number of adolescent (15.0-21.11 years) students (n = 46) and the number of preschool (ages 3.0-4.11 years) children (n = 38).

For many years, a gender difference in the prevalence of autism as large as four males to one female has been reported (Coleman, 1978; Dalldorf & Schopler, 1981; Lord, Schopler, & Revicki, 1982; Wing, 1976). Lord et al. (1982), however, report that most research efforts have found prevalence differences based on gender to be based on relatively small numbers of students. As indicated in Table 1, the results for this large sample were consistent with the findings of other studies regarding the ratio of boys to girls. Further, this result was generally consistent across age groups.

Further examination of the age group data indicates that the largest number of students were served in the school-age group, perhaps consistent with the mandate of federal and state

Table 1
Gender, Race, and Age Group of Autistic Students (n=242)

	Preschool	School-Age	Adolescent
Male (n=200)			
Minority (n=123)	20	80	23
White (n= 77)	11	50	16
Female (n=42)			
Minority (n= 29)	6	19	4
White (n= 13)	1	9	3
Totals	38	158	46

legislation to serve all school-age handicapped students. The smaller number served in the adolescent age range suggests a need for further research to determine where these students might be receiving services. The number of preschoolers is smallest, but this age group includes only three chronological years, and Georgia currently has no mandate to serve handicapped children three or four years of age.

Custody

Table 2 contains a summary of the information on custody by age group for these autistic students. Over 91% of the students remain in the custody of their natural parents. The remaining students are placed in non-institutional placements, Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS) foster care placements, or with adoptive parents. The large number of children and youth remaining with natural parents suggest the commitment these parents have to their children.

Age of Onset of Problem

Table 3 indicates that the age of onset of the problem(s) for these students was generally before three years of age. For 39% of these children, the age of onset occurred before two years of age. Almost all children had been identified by 4 years of age. These results are generally consistent with accepted and reported descriptors of age of onset, and support the need for provision of services to preschool handicapped children (ages 3-5 years) as specified in P.L. 99-457. These data support the provision of services to handicapped infants and toddlers as well.

Services Provided

Over 80% of these students received full day therapeutic classroom services in the Network Programs (see Table 4). All adolescent students received full day services; 85% of the school-age students received full day services; 39% of the preschool students received full day services. Only 41 of the preschool and school-age students received less than one-half day services. This may have been due to placement in less restrictive environments or transitioning

Table 2
Custody by Age Group
(n=242)

	Preschool	School-Age	Adolescent	Total
Natural Parents	38	142	41	221
External Families	0	9	2	11
DFACS Foster Placement	0	4	3	7
Adoptive Parents	0	3	0	3
Totals	38	158	46	242

Table 3
Age of Onset of Problem
(n=242)

Age in Years	Preschool	School-Age	Adolescent	Total
0 to 1	8	21	3	32
1 to 2	19	37	7	63
2 to 3	8	42	6	56
3 to 4	1	28	13	42
4 to 5	0	15	4	19
5 to 6	0	1	3	4
Missing Data	2	14	10	26
Totals	38	158	46	242

to less restrictive environments. For the sample as a whole, the length of services in a Network Program averaged 37.59 months (standard deviation =32.27; range = 1 month to 188 months). Fifteen students had received residential services in addition to Network Program services. Of these, nine school-age students received an average of 37.48 months of Network Program services and 10.55 months of some residential program services; the six adolescents had received an average of 57.30 months of Network Program services and 25.16 months of some residential program services. While the average numbers of months of services in residential placements and in Network Programs are consistent in terms of direction (older age suggests more restrictive and lengthier services), the particular variables which affect the time in placement through the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) might be examined in more detail in future studies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This sample of autistic children is one of the larger samples for whom data are reported in

Table 4
Services Provided
(n=242)

Type of Services	Preschool	School-Age	Adolescent	Total
Resource	23	18	0	41
Modified Self Contained	0	5	0	5
Self Contained	15	135	46	196
Totals	38	158	46	242

the literature. These initial descriptive results are generally consistent with the other results of smaller sample studies as reported in the literature. These results suggest additional questions which can serve as a basis for future examination:

- Is the number of autistic students consistent with other results in the literature? If not, why not?
- Why are there fewer adolescents served in Network Programs than school-age students? If these students are not served in the Network Programs, where are they served?
- What key behaviors signify the onset or identification of problems among these students? Are they similar to those found in the literature on other autistic children and youth?
- Do the data regarding onset mirror the data from the research literature in other areas of handicap?
- What factors seem to influence the placement of autistic students in terms of full day, half-day, and less than half-day placement? What other placements are available to autistic-like students? What is the average length of treatment for autistic-like students in residential placement, in Network Program placement, in less restrictive placements, and what variables are related to time in placement?

Additional questions which might be addressed using available data from the Network Programs include the following:

- What is (are) the primary content areas for the long-term goals and short-term objectives for these students?
- Where are these students placed when they complete a Network Program or other placement?
- Are these students taking prescribed medications? Does such medication positively affect the behavior of the child/youth? How are medications monitored, by whom, when?
- Are there needs for group homes, for respite homes, for alternative care situations?

These questions can serve as a means to focus future research on autistic students in Network Programs.

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GPN Research Report
#89-001, 4, 1989

Leaders' Views of Effective Leadership of GPN Programs

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The 24 directors in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN) responded to a survey concerning selected aspects of their leadership. Results indicated that they have significant leadership experience as individuals and as a group, that they perceive topics important to leadership – communication/trust, problem solving, and required support – similarly, and that they perceive a set of critical success factors similar to those of special education leaders in two other states. Their perceptions of needs for enhancing their own leadership effectiveness clustered in six groups including personnel management strategies, time management skills, and leadership skills. Their perceptions of needs for the GPN clustered into seven areas including future directions, definitions of target population, increased funding for programs, and certification/recruitment. Their reason for remaining in leadership positions in the GPN centered on their ability to develop effective programs for severely emotionally disturbed/severely behavior disordered (SED/SBD) students and their families. Conclusions regarding collegiality, relative local autonomy, and vision are provided with references to other leadership research. Suggestions for future study are provided.

Willower (1987) suggested that inquiry into educational administration during the next 25 years will include a focus on the administrative lives of leaders. While some research has been conducted on aspects of the administrative lives of special education leaders, e.g., planning and problem solving (Brantley, 1989), critical success factors (Burrello & Zadnik, 1986), clinical supervision in special education (DelVal & Griffin, 1988), the vast majority of the

literature in this area has focused on principals and other regular education leaders, e.g., principal leadership styles in curricular areas (Avi-Itzhak & Ben-Peretz, 1987), interpersonal communications of school principals (Bredeson, 1987), training needs for school principals (Johnson & Snyder, 1986), principals and problem solving (Leithwood & Stager, 1989).

Considering Willower's projections and the specialized, complex roles of special education leaders, this study was designed to provide a picture of some aspects of the leadership of one group of special education leaders in Georgia. The sketch included five areas: topics important to effective leadership, factors critical to success, needs for enhancing leadership effectiveness, program needs, and reasons for remaining in leadership positions.

The special education leaders selected for this study were the directors in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN). These 24 directors lead regional, community-based, comprehensive programs for severely emotionally disturbed/severely behaviorally disordered (SED/SBD) students (ages birth through 21 years) and their families. While each program operates individually under the governance of a RESA Board of Control or Advisory Board comprised of the superintendents from the districts served by the program, the programs network as a group through the GPN. The directors manage multiple fund sources, serve and are responsible to multiple school systems in the provision of services through main program locations and satellite locations, collaborate locally with principals and teachers to provide Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) based on individual student needs and unique resources and constraints, collaborate with a variety of other agencies (public and private) in order to provide comprehensive services, and collaborate with each other as colleagues in problem solving and networking activities.

The purpose of this study was to provide a picture of perceptions of effective leadership of one group of special education leaders in Georgia. The results can serve as a profile for comparison with other leaders in Georgia and nationally.

Data Collection and Subjects

Data Collection

A cover letter, three page questionnaire, and return mailing envelope were distributed to the GPN directors at a statewide directors' meeting. A follow-up phone call was made to those who had not returned the information by the deadline date. There was a 100% response rate for all information.

Subjects

The sample was comprised of the 24 directors in the Georgia Psychoeducational Network (GPN). As indicated in Table 1, the group averaged 18.7 years as educators (range of 14 to 30 years), 17.5 years in serving SED/SBD students (range of 13 to 30 years), 13.5 years in the GPN (range of 5 to 17 years), and 10.7 years as a GPN director (range of 2 to 17 years). The group averaged a little over one year in regular education experience (range of 0 to 4 years). Most (83%) held either the education specialist (6th year degree between masters' and doctorate) or the doctoral degree, and most (75%) held two or more educational certificates. Regarding types of certifications, 17 (71%) had special education leadership certification and/or regular education administration certification.

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Table 1
(n=24)
Descriptors of GPN Directors

Gender: Females = 6 ; Males = 18

	Range	Mean	SD
Years in education:	14-30	18.71	3.63
Years in regular education:	0-4	1.17	1.55
Years in SED:	13-30	17.54	3.78
Years in GPN:	5-17	13.50	3.13
Years as GPN program dir.:	2-17	10.67	4.22

Certificates/Degrees

# Certificates	Frequency
1	6
2	9
3	7
4	2

Type of Highest Level of Certificates:

Director of Special Ed	7
Leadership	10
Service	3
Other	4

Current Highest Degree:

EdD/PhD	11
EdS	9
Masters	4

The GPN directors reported a variety of positions in their careers prior to assuming the GPN director position. Sixty-three percent had teaching experience, 46% had been school or clinical psychologists, and 63% had been GPN coordinators (positions within GPN programs which report to the director). Other positions occupied by these individuals included director of special education, school counselor, speech pathologist, program evaluator, psychometrist, curriculum director, Regional Education Services Agency (RESA) staff, and college instructor.

Queries regarding membership and roles in professional organizations over the last four years yielded the following information: The 24 directors listed 119 examples such as member,

committee chair, and/or officer (e.g., president) of professional organizations. The number of services averaged five per director with a range of from 0 to 14 activities.

Analyses

Ratings of Topics Important to Effective Leadership

Twenty topics important to the effective leadership of a GPN director were rated on a 5-point scale, from "Very Unimportant" to "Very Important." The topics were determined based on a review of the literature on leadership and collegiality in effective schools.

Topics included the following: competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1987); trust, management of change, and defining terms (Hoy, Bliss, & Tarter, 1989); problem solving with attention to unique resources and communication/relationships with other leaders (David, 1989); training and technical assistance (Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989); and program evaluation/research (Strusinski, 1989). Additional topics regarding the GPN and statewide concerns (e.g., stability of leaders in group and standards) were also included. Specific wording for each topic was developed based on the literature, the GPN and statewide concerns, and the researchers' perspectives. For example, there were several topics concerning communication/relationships, e.g., with superintendents, with special education directors, and with the Georgia Department of Education.

Table 2 provides the mean ratings and standard deviations for the 20 topics. All items were rated as important. The highest rated items were: relationship with special education directors, relationship with superintendents, focus on SED/SBD students, relationship with the Georgia Department of Education, communication among the directors themselves, trust among directors, GPN Directors' Meetings, and political sensitivity among the directors.

The topics were ordered into three groups based on mean scores indicated in Table 2. The highest rated group emphasized communication and trust among a variety of stakeholders, both within and external to the GPN. This is consistent with the historical emphasis of the GPN on communication and with the current emphasis in effective leadership training on collegiality. It is important to note that this group of topics includes communication and trust both within and external to the GPN. The second highest rated group focused on problem solving both with existing and future challenges. The GPN has operated since 1970 and has emphasized problem solving and high standards, e.g., effective programming, interagency activities, the implementation of P.L. 94-142 (1975) and Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act (1985). The third group is comprised of topics emphasizing required support for the GPN. The stability of leaders in the group and conducting research are perceived as necessary but not as critical to effective leadership in the GPN as some of the other topics.

Ranking of Critical Success Factors

Using the critical success factors of Johnson and Burrello (1988, pg. 11-12), the group rated 15 factors critical to the success of special education leaders. As indicated in Table 3, the top five ranked items by this group concerned instructionally effective programs, the positive image of special education, the broad view of decision making with stakeholders, the need for special education to be perceived as a part of the entire school system, and the need for special education administrators to see themselves as supportive to teachers.

Table 2
Ratings of Topics Important to Your Effective Leadership
(5 Point Scale: 1 = Very Unimportant; 5 = Very Important)
(n = 24)

Topics	Mean	SD
Communication/Trust		
Relationship with special education director	4.96	.20
Relationship with superintendents	4.87	.34
Focus on SED/SBD students	4.83	.38
Relationship with State Department of Education	4.79	.41
Communication among directors' group	4.75	.44
Trust among directors	4.71	.55
Directors' meetings	4.71	.46
Political sensitivity among directors	4.67	.48
Problem Solving		
Growth – new tasks and challenges	4.53	.59
Training & technical assistance available within group	4.52	.79
Common approaches – unique solutions	4.50	.59
Problem solving on statewide basis	4.42	.58
Standards – implicit from directors	4.38	.63
Standards – explicit from GDOE	4.33	.76
Needed Support		
Stability of leaders in group	4.29	.62
Resources provided to directors to meet	4.27	.83
Frequency of directors' meetings	4.25	.44
Programs and activities among directors	4.25	.53
Research consortium	4.08	.97
Competition among directors	2.58	1.32

The summary results from Massachusetts and Indiana were obtained from a study of special education directors in urban areas and urban/rural areas including cooperatives respectively (Johnson & Burrello, 1988). These two groups are appropriate for comparisons with the GPN sample because the 24 GPN programs serve combinations of urban and rural areas comprised of from 2 to 17 school districts. A comparison of the results between the GPN sample and the two other groups reveals significant consistency, especially on seven of the top ten items. This consistency on critical success factors is strong across both urban/rural areas and geographic areas of the country suggesting a need for consistent expertise for leaders nationally. While there are consistencies, there are also differences across states which suggest that leaders may need common expertise as well as expertise which is unique to states or other relevant geographic areas. The commonality of perceptions of critical success factors across states may provide opportunities for improving leadership positions across state lines without major

Table 3
Ranking of Critical Success Factors* (n=24)

Critical Success Factors	Ranking GPN Leaders	Mass*	Ind*
Special education must demonstrate that it is providing instructionally effective programs and services that promote student growth in three areas: academic, behavioral and social.	1	1.5	1
Special education must project a positive image.	2	3	8
Special education administrators must make decisions that consider the broad view (entire picture) and in a timely way that involves input from key stakeholders.	3.5	-	-
Special education must be perceived as a part of the entire school system(s) and participate in the regular education process in such areas as personnel development.	3.5	1.5	2
Special education administrators must see themselves as supportive to teachers.	5	6.5	6
Special education administrators must have the capacity to problem-solve or anticipate the problem before it becomes the superintendent's problem.	6	8	5
Special education administrators must get support from the community and upper Management.	8	4	-
Special education personnel should work to make parents of exceptional children feel included and acknowledge that good things are happening for students.	8	5	7
Special education programs must make effective changes in students as evidenced by students returning to regular classrooms and in their social and emotional adjustment.	8	10	-
Special education must develop procedures that are reasonable and consistently followed.	10.5	6.5	4
Special education administrators must be perceived as being fair by staff while working on their behalf.	10.5	-	-
Special education administrators should communicate with principals on short- and long-range planning and changes.	13	-	-
Special education directors must build trust through the accurate use of data.	13	-	--
Special education staff must be realistic and meet goals and expected outcomes.	13	9	-

*From: Johnson, V.L., Jr., & Burrello, L.C. (1988). Critical success factors of rural and urban special education administrators. *Special Services in the Schools*, 4(1/2), 1-15.

retooling.

Needs to Enhance Leadership Effectiveness

The request for perceptions of needs to enhance leadership effectiveness was an open-ended response item. The results clustered in six areas (see Table 4). The area of most frequent responses (15 responses) was the area of personnel management strategies (e.g., keeping staff motivated, ability to include all staff as important contributors). The second area was time management skills with 9 responses (e.g., saying "No," avoiding procrastination). The third area was leadership skills which received 7 responses (e.g., effective communication of program success, assertive leadership training). The last three areas concerned money management (creative budgeting), skills in recruitment and retention of staff, certification, and a group of other items which could not be classified in the other five major areas.

The area of most frequent responses is consistent with the belief that people are the most important asset in educational programming. Comments focused on ways to more effectively manage or lead personnel. The second area reflects the common problem of overload which most leaders experience today. The third area focuses more specifically on leadership effectiveness, particularly skills. Coupled with the first two areas, the GPN directors articulated the need to analyze current leadership skills and improve those skills. The last three areas reflect the constant need to maximize the effective use of multiple categories of funds as well as recruit and retain staff.

Needs Perceived for the Network

There were seven categories of responses to this open-ended item on the questionnaire (see Table 5). The first four major categories were future directions (n = 15 responses), definitions relative to eligibility for service as emotionally handicapped and socially maladjusted (n = 7 responses), resources in the form of more equitable funding and increased dollars (n = 7 responses), and certification and recruitment including retention of staff as well as recruitment of new staff (n = 7 responses). The remaining responses fell into three categories including regular education support.

The emphasis on future directions is consistent with the continuing adaptation and flexibility of the GPN since 1970 and with the problem solving orientation of this group of leaders. The emphasis reflects an assumption that "the only constant is change." The second category reflects the state and national concern over the educational distinction of the difference between socially maladjusted and severely emotionally disturbed students. This is clearly a part of the future mission which leaders perceive as needing additional clarification. The third category reflects the continuing concern over the "flat" funding profile (essentially less than cost of living increases) for the GPN for the past four years. This is consistent as well with the concern over the limitations of QBE funding (weighted formula) as it concerns special education funding throughout the state (Brantley, 1989). The fourth emphasis on certification and recruitment is a clear and present problem considering the shortages of teachers entering and/or completing college/university programs in the SED/SBD area.

Reasons for Staying in the Network as a Leader

While there was a variety of responses to this open-ended item, the consistent response indicated that each leader perceived his/her primary role to be one of developing effective

Table 4
Needs You Have to Enhance Your Leadership Effectiveness With Example Responses (n=24)

Needs (examples)	Frequency
Personnel Management Strategies	15
(Keeping staff motivated)	
(Ability to bring in all in group as important contributors)	
(Develop better methods of communicating with staff)	
Time Management Skills	9
(Learning to say "no" and therefore not "overload")	
(Avoid procrastination especially with difficult issues)	
(More hours in my working day!)	
(How to find enough time to get it all done)	
(Time to review other programs)	
Leadership Skills	7
(Effective communication of program success)	
(Leadership instruction)	
(Consultation regarding my skills; what am I doing?)	
(Assertive leadership training)	
Money Management	4
(Learn to make better use of available resources)	
(Creative budgeting--money management)	
(More money to develop effective programming)	
Skills in Recruitment/Retention of Staff and Certification	3
(More appropriately trained applicants for teaching positions to allow me to be able to pick and choose)	
Other	
(Relationship with school administrators)	
(Programs in place for socially maladjusted students)	
(Additional administrative staff)	
(Immediate access to consultation with a knowledgeable special education attorney)	
(Much higher level of activity of task forces with psychoed directors)	
(Stimulating discussions/workshops for keeping a vision beyond my own local environment)	

programs for SED/SBD students. The directors responded that there was a challenge, that they had the opportunity to effect change for improved programs, and that their leadership could make a difference in the lives of their students and their families.

Statistical Analyses

Exploratory t-tests and analyses of variance were conducted to examine the data for

Table 5
Needs You Perceive for the GPN
(n=24)

Needs (Examples)	Frequency
Future Directions	15
A Review of Our Mission!	
Futuristic approach – look ahead, what will schools be like, what will be needed of us?	
To develop an understanding of the GPN role in developing services for other low incidence handicaps and preschool	
Maintain focus on SED/SBD rather than other populations	
Developing a key role in service to the disturbed child and drug abuse	
Definitions	7
Change BD to emotionally handicapped	
Clarify and strengthen diagnostic categories for those whom we serve (Soc. Mal. v SED)	
Consistent directions in philosophy of conduct disorders and social maladjustment v ED/BD	
Money/Funding	7
More equitable funding (based on actual # served, not census)	
Significantly increased funding level and fiscal flexibility	
Budget – more dollars for psychoed services	
Certification/Recruitment	7
Recruitment of competent staff	
Concerted effort to entice people into field – certification made more accessible	
Staff retention	
Regular Education Relationship	5
Make reg. ed. teachers more aware of types of children to refer	
Being a part of the regular education system	
Support	4
Understanding of each other's programs	
Continued acceptance of each other and our strengths whether it be for treatment, general administration, budget, etc.	
Support system for directors, other administrators/supervisors	
Other	
Develop unified research goals	
More equal division of network tasks	
Positive image in the state	
More full day programs network-wide	
More self-contained LEA BD classes	
More alternative school placement programs for Soc Mal.	

possible significant differences among the sample subgroups for gender, number of years experience, certification type and number, and highest degree. The dependent variables were the topics of importance and the critical success factors. No significant differences were found at the .05 level.

Discussion and Conclusions

These 24 special education leaders have been working together as colleagues for an average of over 10 years, working collegially in problem solving and networking activities on a continuing basis and meeting at least four times per year on a formal basis. It is not surprising that no statistically significant differences were found across the dependent variables.

Regarding the topics important to effective leadership, the closely grouped means and small standard deviations strongly suggest that the group has consistent perceptions based on common values and norms regarding their complex leadership roles. Concerning the critical success factors, the similarities between the leaders in Georgia and those in two other states suggest that preservice preparation programs should focus on a common core of skills and expertise. Staff development programs, on a continuing basis, should focus on expertise-skills-issues unique to a state or other geographical area.

Information relative to needs for improvement of the leaders suggested a clear internal focus; the results of the question concerning the needs for the GPN suggest a clear external focus. The visions of these leaders seem, as a group, to incorporate both the internal foci (emphasis on day-to-day operation at the program site) and the external foci (emphasis on future directions and network-wide needs) in a balanced binocular vision of success.

A common thread running through all the perceptions of these special education leaders is the emphasis on relationships (effective interactions) with people. The importance of communication and relationships with external and internal groups, the emphasis on needs for personnel management/leadership, and the needs for staff recruitment and retention support this consistent theme.

Considering the role of these programs as relatively autonomous schools/sites seeking local solutions to local problems, recognizing the diversity of experiences and longevity of leadership roles within the group, assuming that the perceptions of these leaders are accurate, and recognizing the consistency of perceptions across measures, it is apparent that these leaders work effectively as individuals and as a team, emphasize collegiality, and understand and are committed to their collective mission. Accepting these conclusions, several results support findings from the literature. First, the consistency of perceptions in topics and critical success factors suggests positive interpersonal relationships and social support which reflects similar findings to those of Johnson and Johnson (1987). Second, there is recognition of the need to continue to improve leadership skills. Considering the continuing formal and informal meetings among these leaders and the recognition of need for improvement, the collegial structure is probably the most appropriate and effective means to accomplish such improvement (Kline, 1987). Third, the continued orientation of these leaders to a collegial approach is consistent with generalizing Glickman's (1989) suggestions concerning principals as leaders of teacher leaders.

The results of this study support the conclusion that these special education leaders have a mission to serve SED/SBD students as leaders (topics of importance to leaders and critical success factors), have a vision both in terms of individual leadership needs (internal) and in

terms of program needs for the GPN (external), and have a passion to achieve both the mission and the vision (reasons for remaining as a leader).

Additional research might investigate the communication/ relationships between directors and their coordinators, directors and their other staff members, and additional aspects of the administrative lives of these leaders such as leadership styles.

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